

Transition Point 4: Intermediate School to Middle School

Transition: The Next Step

Transition is movement or change without interruption. It should be a smooth flow from one place or condition to another. While the transition plan for a student receiving special education services is designed to prepare him or her for life after high school, transition can start when a child enters preschool or at middle school which is the fourth of six distinct stages or transition points.

Factors of Change

The transition from intermediate school to middle school focuses on more than just academic changes and physical growth. The student is developing additional life skills and independence.

Some of the skills that children typically have or will develop during this time can be categorized as follows:

personal management - gets up and dresses him/herself in the morning; independently cares for personal hygiene and grooming; follows safety rules; and independently completes assigned household chores; independently moves from one class to another in allowable time; adapts to different teaching styles; and takes more responsibility for notes, materials, planning time, etc. with less adult help.

socialization - has age-appropriate friends, with and without disabilities; resolves conflicts with friends effectively; participates in activities with friends; and demonstrates being a friend.

transportation - negotiates his/her own neighborhood and school, and identifies various means of transportation.

self-advocacy - communicates his/her needs effectively and assertively, and has opportunities to make choices and decisions.

employment/career awareness - explains parent(s) jobs; names 10 types of jobs; explains his/her academic strengths and weaknesses; explains how his/her skills relate to a job; is developing work responsibilities; and states likes/dislikes and interests in particular jobs.

independent living - earns allowance; spends own money; discusses various types of living arrangements; and describes his/her physical needs/medical needs.

community participation - goes to movies, the library, restaurants, sporting activities; participates in youth groups and school activities; and expresses his/her interest in various recreational activities.

Ages and Stages

Middle school grades are usually sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Students are typically twelve to fourteen years old.

As with any stage of development there are variations. They're even more pronounced at this age when boys and girls enter puberty at staggered times. This fact is just as confusing to students as it is to parents and educators. Both parents and children need accurate information about the developmental changes that are occurring. Physical and emotional transformations are typical. Physicians, school nurses, counselors, and related service providers can provide insight on issues that arise during this stage of development. Don't hesitate to seek outside advice and assistance from parent groups and community organizations that serve families and adolescents.

Making the Transition Smoother

Shortly after your child starts his/her last year in intermediate school, begin to prepare for the upcoming transition to middle school. Ask the teacher about how all students are prepared for the transfer. If necessary, include those plans, or ones more specific to your child's needs, into the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Specific plans to accommodate changes in academic expectations and opportunities, social and recreational skills, transportation and mobility concerns, and life skills may need to be addressed long before the transition actually occurs.

Before the end of the school year, find out what placement options will be available. Plan several visits to meet with the new teacher(s) and support staff. Ask questions about programs to allow you to become familiar with the school. Don't limit your observations to just a single visit.

Be prepared and involved at the time of the IEP meeting that will determine the change of placement and appropriate goals and objectives for the coming year. Have your child attend the IEP, or speak on his/her behalf. (This could be a good time to have your child learn to lead their own IEP.) The meeting should include teachers and staff from the present school and from the new school. It's important to include all of the new teachers so they are familiar with the student and his/her IEP. Classes may change each semester, so remember to involve new teachers before the transition occurs.

As necessary, include modifications to the class work that may help your child succeed. In addition to strategies and modifications, the use of Assistive Technology (AT) devices, both low-technology and high-technology, may lessen some of the barriers to learnings. Consideration should be given to the need for AT during the comprehensive evaluation.

Consider how the child's disability may impact non-class activities as well, and plan accommodations for those outings. Clarify the school's grading policies and indicate needed adjustments in the IEP. The IEP should also include strategies to keep communication open between special education teachers and regular education staff. It's just as important to maintain regular communication between the teachers and home. Detail transition activities, establish a time line and determine who is responsible for completing individual tasks.

Discuss the upcoming program changes with your child to get his/her opinion. Allow for student visitations to the new school to meet teachers and staff, and to become familiar with the new surroundings. Peer buddies and/or peer tutor programs are very helpful to ease anxiety and to foster new friendships. Use more than one buddy as a backup. Give your child opportunities to ask questions and express concerns. All students entering middle school are fearful to some degree. It's not uncommon for them to need lots of encouragement.

Once this transition has been made, it won't be too long until the next big transition - high school. Think about what you would like to see your child doing in the next five years or so. What are your concerns? Are educational goals on target? Have recreation and leisure activities been addressed? Are you familiar with community resources? Listen to what your child has to say about his/her future plans and desires. What are his/her interests and capabilities? Utilize local career fairs, books, and people in the community to stimulate your child's exploration of potential educational and career possibilities. Ask your special education director or teacher if the district has a community transition planning team open to parent participation. The more informed, prepared, and involved a parent is in the transition process, the more likely the change will be easy for the whole family.

Reference

Transition Services: Developing & Including Transition Services in the IEP, Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services.

Organizations/Websites

ADE, Exceptional Students Services, 1535 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ, 85007, 800-352-4558,
Parent Information Network, 602-364-4015, <http://www.ade.az.gov/ess/pinspals>
Transition Services, 602-364-4026, <http://www.ade.az.gov/ess/transitionservices>

InterAct Arizona, Student-Led IEP Project, 602-264-9606, <http://www.studentledieps.org>

Learning Disabilities Association of Arizona, 13106 W. Limwood Dr., Sun City West, AZ, 85013,
623-975-4551, <http://www.lidaamerica.org/>

NICHCY (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities), P.O. Box 1492,
Washington, DC 20013-1492, 800-695-0285, <http://www.nichcy.org>

Books

Kennedy, C., Ph.D. & Fisher, D. Ph.D., (2001) *Inclusive Middle Schools*, Baltimore, MD/Brookes Publishing, 800-638-3775, <http://www.pbrookes.com>

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1589, 800-845-6232, <http://www.cec.sped.org/bk/catalog>

Videos

Child Development Media, Inc., 5632 Van Nuys Blvd., #286, Van Nuys, CA 91401, 800-405-8942, <http://www.childdevelopmentmedia.com/>

PBS Video, Public Broadcasting Service, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314-1698, 800-344-3337, <http://teacher.shop.pbs.org>

This document was developed in June 1997, by Becky Raabe, Parent Information Network Specialist, Contract ED9-0011-002, with funds allocated by the U.S. Department of Education under IDEA '97. The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the agency, nor should endorsement by the federal government be assumed. The Arizona Department of Education, a state education agency, is an equal opportunity employer and affirms that it does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, age, sex or handicapping condition. This document is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated in its entirety. Parts may be excerpted provided that credit is given to the ADE/PIN. Rev.11/02
BR TR20